

The Center for
Family Justice
(Bridgeport)
203-333-2233 hotline
203-334-6154 office

Women's Center
of Greater Danbury
203-731-5204 hotline
203-731-5200 office

Women & Families Center
(Meriden)
203-235-9297 office
(Middletown)
860-344-1474 office
(New Haven)
203-235-4444 hotline
203-389-5010 office

Rape Crisis Center
of Milford
203-878-1212 hotline
203-874-8712 office

YWCA New Britain
Sexual Assault Crisis Service
(New Britain)
860-223-1787 hotline
860-225-4681 office
(Hartford)
860-547-1022 hotline
860-225-4681 office

The Center for Sexual Assault
Crisis Counseling and Education
(Stamford)
203-329-2929 hotline
203-348-9346 office

Susan B. Anthony Project
(Torrington)
860-482-7133 hotline
860-489-3798 office

Safe Haven of
Greater Waterbury
203-753-3613 hotline
203-575-0388 office

Sexual Assault Crisis Center
of Eastern Connecticut
(Willimantic)
860-456-2789 hotline
860-456-3595 office
(New London)
860-437-7766 hotline
860-442-0604 office

96 Pitkin Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
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Testimony of Laura Cordes, Executive Director Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS) Regarding Governor's Proposed FY 18-19 Budget Department of Public Health - Rape Crisis Intervention and Prevention Services

Appropriations Committee
Thursday, February 23, 2017

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Laura Cordes, and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS). The Alliance is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs whose mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services.

On behalf of our member programs and the victims and survivors that we serve, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you this evening and for your history of supporting those who work every day with child, adolescent and adult victims of sexual violence.

We understand and respect the current fiscal reality and budget constraints that the state faces, as well as the difficult choices that are before you. The Governor's budget recognizes the continued need for front line sexual assault crisis services and programs throughout our state. We ask that as you work to uphold the state's longstanding commitment to its residents to address sexual violence that you keep the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services proposed in the Governor's budget.

As the state's leading voice to end sexual violence for over 35 years, we have worked to elevate and address the needs of sexual assault victims. We have made significant progress. State dollars have been key to this progress as they provide critical core funding for our programs and have served as a state match for other federal funds.

Here in Connecticut, across the country and at the highest levels of Government, more people are invested in preventing sexual violence and improving the response to victims of these crimes than ever before. With a spotlight on campus sexual violence, new Connecticut K-12 requirements for sexual assault awareness and prevention education, and new federal and state laws encouraging collaboration with sexual assault crisis services programs, more victims are using their courage to come forward, and requests for prevention education and training programs have increased statewide.

In order to fully effect the change we all seek, sexual violence prevention and victim advocacy and services will require a deeper investment in community-based sexual assault crisis services and training and technical assistance programs for community leaders and first responders.

**Statewide 24 Hour
Toll Free Hotline:**

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1-888-568-8332 ESPAÑOL

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Sexual assault is widespread; nearly 20% of Connecticut residents have been victimized in their lifetime. The physical and emotional trauma can have devastating short and long term health consequences on victims and their families. In the aftermath, they need compassion, support, and access to services and justice. The Alliance sexual assault crisis services are the only programs in Connecticut that specialize in both the counseling and advocacy needs of sexual assault survivors and their supporters.

We proudly work to address the unique and emerging needs of victims, including: victims of child sexual abuse, campus sexual assault, prison sexual assault, and survivors from LGBTQ communities. Additionally we operate of the only Spanish -speaking, free and confidential 24 hour hotlines in the country.

Advocates at local sexual assault crisis services programs provide services at all hours of the day and night- crisis counseling, support groups, accompaniment to hospitals, courts and police stations-all free of charge. This kind of response is unique to sexual assault victim advocates, and it has a long-term positive impact on the physical health and emotional well-being of survivors of sexual violence.

During our last fiscal year, certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information, and referrals to over 6300 victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state. Additional support numbers include:

- Provided Services and support to over 1,200 Latina/o victims and survivors
- Provided services and support to over 500 college students
- Provided 22,400 hours of personal support and advocacy
- Supported over 500 victims during sexual assault forensic exams at hospitals
- Held support groups with over 3,000 participants
- Answered and provided support to 2,228 hotline callers
- Provided criminal justice advocacy to over 1200 victims and survivors
- Held 14,189 individual counseling sessions
- Provided 40,000 individuals with prevention education and professional development programs

Our advocates frequently answer calls and get out of bed at 3am or go to the hospital with a victim for three, four, five or more hours to provide support during a forensic evidence exam. We help survivors understand their options and navigate a complex medical and criminal justice system. When a sexual assault survivor needs someone to talk to on a Sunday afternoon, victim advocates are available to take their call. Our advocates staff one of the nation's only statewide Spanish-language rape crisis hotlines; run support groups; provide individual and group counseling; participate in the Multi-Disciplinary Teams that review child abuse cases; undertake community awareness campaigns; and provide

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education and training to schools, law enforcement, service providers, and community members.

In client feedback surveys,

- over 95% of respondents said that the services they received at sexual assault crisis services programs met or exceeded their expectations;
- 97% of clients agree or very much agree that their counselor/advocate helped them to understand and manage their feelings; and
- 97% said their counselor/advocate helped them understand the effects of trauma and provided information about available resources, options, and additional services.

When our dollars are stretched further and further, positions at our programs are left vacant, and victims must wait for services and other providers and partners must wait for training. When budget constraints require staff to work long hours and forgo increased pay, many will not receive a livable wage, and qualified advocates have to choose between the important work that they love and leaving for higher paying jobs in other sectors.

Please continue to support these critical services for victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse by keeping the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services in the Governor's budget.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to speak with you this evening.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information about the importance of full funding for rape crisis services.

Thank you.

Laura Cordes

Phone: 860-282-9881

Email: Laura@EndSexualViolenceCT.org

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